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WASHINGTON'S UNOFFICIAL GAME GUIDE

HomeStand

SEPTEMBER 20-22 | VS. SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS

SEPTEMBER 23-25 | VS. NEW YORK METS

Back For Seconds

Injuries take their toll on Jose Vidro, but he continues to play on

Bucking the Trend

With each start, Pedro Martinez shows how valuable he is to N.Y.



express

A publication of **The Washington Post**

(off the) Field

 FIVE MINUTES WITH: JOHN PATTERSON

JOHN PATTERSON has been one of the more consistent pitchers on the Nationals this year, having thrown two complete games and holding down a 2.65 ERA out of the third spot in the rotation.

Do you feel bad when you bean a batter?

I hit Miguel Cabrera earlier in the season. I hit him in the face. The pitch just got away from me. That's something I don't ever like to see. But it's part of the game; they know that. There's a difference when they know you didn't do it intentionally, or if the ball just got away from you.

What do you hope the new stadium will be like?

A good environment for the fans. Just a really cool place for the fans to come watch the game. I've really enjoyed playing in front of these

fans here. I think if you give them a nice stadium where they can come watch the game, scream, have a good time, that would be best.

What's the hardest play for you to make in the field?

A tough play is a hard bunt right down the third-base line or something, where you really don't have time to pick the ball up and try to spin and throw it. Those are tough plays. It's either do or die; you either make it or you don't.

Have you been around Washington a lot yet?

This year, I haven't been around D.C. a whole lot. I stay in the one little area I live in. I've been focusing



ACE: John Patterson is arguably the best pitcher on the Washington Nationals.

on bringing a championship here this year. I really haven't been out much at all.

How have you guys been treating the rookies this year?

It's been a good environment for them. They haven't had to deal with too much yet. I'm sure they will before it's all over with.

If you could have a small role in a movie, what kind of movie would it be?

I'd like to be in a movie like "Dazed and Confused." Those are some cool characters to play.

Do you have a favorite football team?

I like following the University of Texas and Texas A&M. Professionally, I like the Cowboys.

What do you see the Cowboys doing this year?

Who knows? I don't think even they have any idea what they're capable of doing this year. Hopefully they'll finish better than they did last year.

CHRIS MINCHER

W	L	ERA	G	GS	CG	SHO	SV	SVO	IP	H	R	ER	HR	HBP	BB	SO
16	16	3.86	70	60	2	1	1	1	363.2	339	163	156	45	15	138	338

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Second Best

Injury plagued infielder remains one of the Nationals stars

WHEN HE WAS GROWING UP

In Puerto Rico, Jose Vidro grabbed his baseball glove every day after school and headed for the fields in the center of town. "I didn't like soccer that much, and I wasn't that good at school," he said, "so baseball was what I did every day from the time I was five years old."

In 1992, when he was 17, the scrawny teenager from Mayaguez was Montreal's sixth-round draft choice. Expos scout Fred Ferreira signed him for a \$30,000 bonus, and for the next five years Vidro honed his skills and his English as he moved up the Expos' minor league ladder.

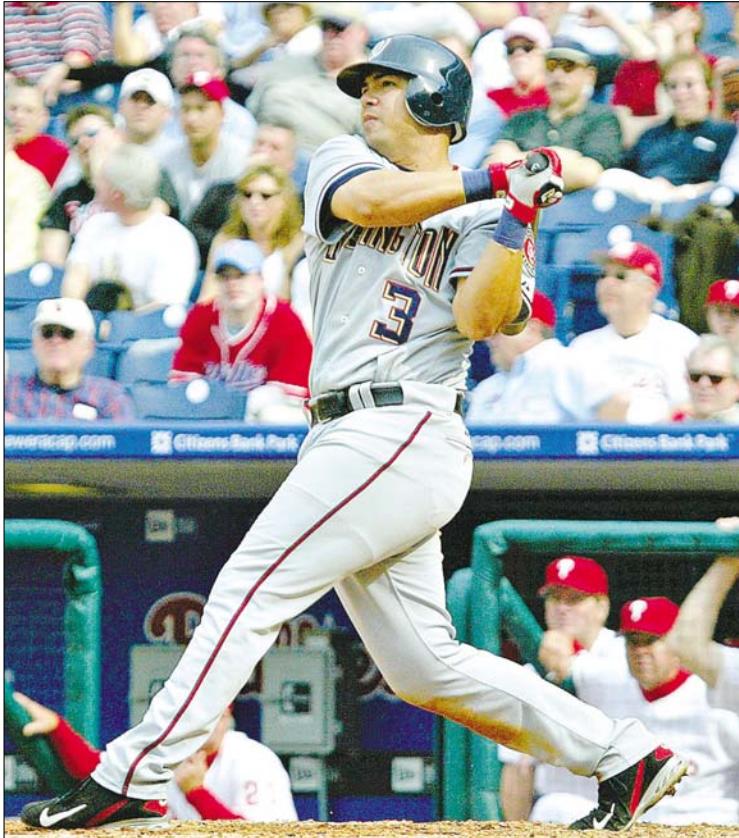
"He was not ready when we first brought him up. But that's what we had to do with many players. We played him at third base, first base and left field, yet we knew he was a second baseman and finally he got there," said former Montreal manager Felipe Alou, known for his prowess in developing young talent.

"Once he played winter ball and hit over .400 he got on the right track and we knew he could be an exceptional hitter. Good athletes find a way to get it done," Alou added.

Thirteen years later, Vidro is a three-time National League All-Star, a career .304 hitter, a slick infielder and without a doubt the Washington Nationals' best all-around player. But because of an injury riddled 2005 season, there just aren't many Nationals fans who know it.

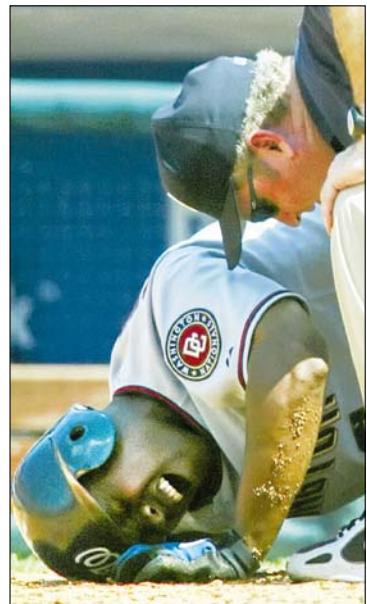
Hardly an imposing presence at 5-foot-11, 193 pounds, Vidro has no real flaws in his game. A switch-hitter, he surpassed the .300 mark for five straight seasons before dipping to .294 during an injury-plagued 2004 campaign. He's hit as many as 24 homers in a season, driven in as many as 97 runs and owns a career .983 fielding percentage.

The stats tell only part of the story, though. Those who have watched Vidro play every day for the past eight years marvel at the intangible qualities he brings to



LOST SEASON: Jose Vidro has played only 80 games due to his ailments this year.

YR	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	TB	SB	CS	SF	SH	Avg	SLG
'04	110	412	51	121	24	0	14	60	71	187	3	1	2	4	.294	.454
'05	80	300	38	82	30	2	7	32	27	127	0	0	4	2	.273	.423



Despite several injuries, Jose Guillen has avoided the disabled list this year.

ALL-TIME EXPO

Jose Vidro was loyal to the Expos long enough to land on most team all-time lists:

- Was 5th all-time in Expos' history for doubles, with 294
- Sixth in team history for total bases (1639) and runs (524)
- Seventh in games and at-bats

the field: his defense, his leadership and his passion for the game of baseball.

Throughout his career Vidro has played with a quiet determination — sometimes too quiet.

In 2001 a fastball from Houston Astros righthander Roy Oswalt hit Vidro in the batting helmet. He missed one game, then talked his way back into the lineup. Vidro played two more games, concealing his headaches and blurred vision, before admitting he was ailing. (His injury was eventually diagnosed as a mild concussion, which kept him out of the lineup for two weeks.)

"He's one of the toughest guys in the league, and that's what makes guys on his team respect him so much," said former teammate Orlando Cabrera.

For all of that, he's earned three trips to the All-Star Game and a reputation inside baseball circles as one of the game's best second basemen.

Vidro, who had a chance to become a free agent last year — the Yankees were prepared to open up George Steinbrenner's checkbook to sign him — instead chose to sign a four-year, \$30 million extension with the Montreal Expos.

He signed his deal in May 2004, when the future of the franchise was totally uncertain. He had no idea where the club would play in 2005, but he was fine with that as long as it was playing somewhere.

At the time, it perhaps seemed foolish but he wanted to be part of the franchise's future. He had seen the down times over eight seasons in Montreal. He wanted to be around for the good times ahead in Washington.

"I was told that a lot of things were going to change," he said. "I was told about moving to Washington, too. When I signed, a lot of people questioned why I did it. But it seems like a good decision right now... This is the place I feel comfortable. I run things in this clubhouse. The guys here respect me here, and I respect all of them. It feels good it is that way. For me to stay here, this is my home."

BRUCE R. WELLS

When the Pain Won't Go Away

IT WOULD BE EASY to mistake the Washington Nationals clubhouse for a M.A.S.H. unit this season.

Currently no fewer than six Nationals players are out for the season.

Key regulars Jose Vidro, Nick Johnson and reserves Ryan Church and Junior Spivey have all spent time on the disabled list. Starting pitchers haven't been immune either. Washington has lost both Ryan Drese and Tony Armas for the season.

Yet, of all the walking wounded this season, no one has been missed as much as Vidro.

The Vidro who has played for the Nationals this season bears little resemblance to the one who went to three All-Star games with the Expos. The Nationals second baseman is having his worst season since 1998, when he hit .220. Slowed by knee surgery that ended his 2004 season, Vidro has never been close to 100 percent this year. He tore an ankle tendon in

May and spent two months on the DL. Since coming back he has suffered from two strained quadriceps. As the Nats closed out their road trip in San Diego, the career .301 hitter was batting .274.

"He's not even close to being to what he's capable of being when he's healthy," manager Frank Robinson said.

At first, Robinson thought Vidro was going to just pinch-hit for the rest of the season. However, the pain in Vidro's legs subsided. On Sept. 16, he was back in the starting lineup for the first time since Sept. 1. He had missed 13 of the last 14 games (he was a pinch-hitter in that one game) because of a sore right knee.

"I feel like I'm ready to play, and that's why I'm there in the lineup. It's been a very frustrating year for me. I want to be out there," Vidro said. "At the same time, the team is doing good right now. I'm going to try and help the ball club as best I can. Hopefully, I will not have anymore setbacks." BRUCE R. WELLS



Who wants a hot dog when you can get this oversized Italian sausage at a grill at RFK? Other options include burritos and pizza.

Outside the Bun

When a hot dog just won't do at a Nats game

BALLPARK CONCESSIONS have come a long way from the peanuts and Cracker Jack described in the classic tune "Take Me Out to the Ballgame." Indeed, as the season has progressed, the proliferation of eating options at RFK has accelerated to the point where variety easily trumps any mall food court. So if you've had enough of the same-old, same-old, the stadium offers quite a few breaks from the stand-snack staples.

Burritos: They're the staples of any traditional American ballpark experience: peanuts, hot dogs, and football-sized, dense, bursting-at-its-tortilla-seams burritos. OK, so maybe not that last one, but that doesn't mean it's not the quick-

est way at RFK to make yourself painfully full. At one of the two Burrito Brothers stands, located on the 300 and 500 levels, you can have an intimidatingly plump burrito — or anything else from the regular menu of the Burrito Brothers chain — assembled right in front of you. Founder Dushawn Hawkins said that "everything is fresh," and, while slowly conquering one of their bulging monstrosities, it's not hard to believe.

Italian Sausage: Geez, you're still eating hot dogs? Talk about passé. Sure, you can get a standard mystery-meat hot dog if you want, but most people have made the upgrade. The advantages to an Italian sausage: bigger, plumper, with a more

distinct flavor. They are available at a grill every two to three sections.

Pizza: It's generally a bad idea to buy pizza out of its element. But if you're in the market for a slice, you won't have to settle for either lukewarm rubber-crust or a limp grease-sponge. While many stadiums are sponsored by a major chain, RFK serves up Freschetta pizzas, which "we've heard a lot of positive feedback about," sports and entertainment manager Greg Costa said. It's not completely short on grease, but the pizza comes on a thick, soft crust that helps soak some grease up. They're generous with the toppings, and the sauce has a little bit of zest. It's available every 5 sections on the upper levels. **CHRIS MINCHER**

(Nationals) Archive Nats Close In on Title

1924 | Yes, Washington, there is baseball in October as fans of the Nationals were about to find out.

On Sept. 20 — or Game No. 148 of the season, the Nationals sat above the New York Yankees in the American League standings, and there was no looking back. Eventually, the team would go on to win the nation's capital's only World Series.

But Walter Johnson, just named the league MVP, was shelled. Luckily for him, a Goose Goslin-led attack got Washington into extra innings. And in the 10th inning, Goslin drilled his second homer of the day for a 14-13 lead. Just as victory seemed at hand, a botched double play in the bottom half of the inning led to a St. Louis 15-14 win. Luckily, the Yankees also lost to keep Washington in first place.

A rain delay pushed game time to well after 4 p.m. on Sept. 21. By then, the Nationals knew the Yankees had lost. Buoyed

by the news, the team grabbed a 6-4 lead after 7 innings, when the game was called due to darkness.

Two days after his worst start of the year, Johnson looked like "The Big Train" again when he shut down the Chicago White Sox for his 13th straight win. (He got a no decision earlier in the week). Johnson lifted his career strike-out total to 3,220 as Washington won 8-3 to maintain its two-game lead.

The winning continued against Chicago, 7-6. The White Sox again obliged Washington with a victory the next day. This time, the score was 6-3 while the Yankees shut out Cleveland to keep the New Yorkers two games back of the pennant leaders.

NATIONALS ARCHIVE is a week-by-week recap of the team's World Series-winning 1924 season.

Season's Greetings

→ It would be so easy to hate Barry Bonds if he weren't so good.

He's often surly in public. He acts like a prima donna in the clubhouse — where the San Francisco Giants have given him three lockers. He seemingly has a perpetual chip on his shoulder, paranoid someone is out to get him.

Oh yeah, Bonds also used steroids, unknowingly or not, depending on your BS detector.

That's the side you hear most about Bonds.

Then there is the undeniable fact that he's baseball biggest star.

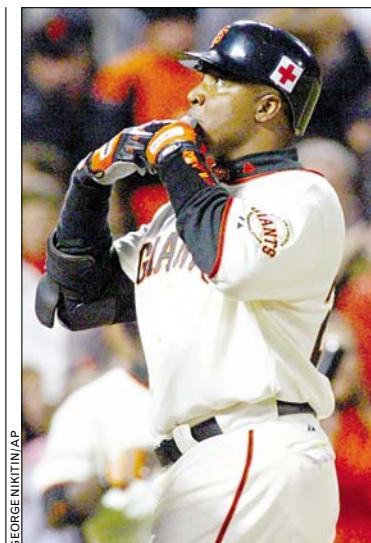
Fittingly a member of a team called the Giants, Bonds' accomplishments are second to two: Babe Ruth and Hank Aaron.

No matter how you slice it, 705 home runs is amazing. Almost as awe-inspiring is the fear pitchers had for Bonds the past four years. Never in the modern era has someone received so many intentional walks.

He's baseball big fish, which is why his involvement in the BALCO scandal made the drug supplement company a household name.

His contempt for the steroid witch hunt is almost laudable. Surely Bonds didn't think anyone would believe he thought flaxseed oil would enlarge his muscles and oversized head. But he said he thought it did anyway, challenging Major League Baseball to take down its biggest star.

The league showed this year it was willing to nab a Hall of Famer in Rafael Palmeiro, who tested positive for performance enhancing drugs. But Bonds has been above the fray in the world



GEORGENIKITIN/AP
Barry Bonds will play his first road games of the year at RFK Stadium.

of baseball even as his body broke down this offseason.

It was only last week when the Giant took his first at-bat of 2005. For the record, he nearly homered in his first game, but fan interference turned the big blow into a double.

Now Bonds finally comes to the nation's capital — remember he didn't testify in front of Congress in March? — to face the Nationals. I know I'm waiting for the inevitable Hector Carrasco — Bonds matchup. That's the stuff dreams are made of.

But seriously, it's exciting to have Bonds here. His complexity and talent mixed with the ego and steroids is fascinating.

Boo if you like. Cheer if you like. You're right either way.

MATT SWENSON

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(Scorecard: Away)

6 | HOMESTAND | SEPTEMBER 20-25, 2005

(Scorecard: Home)

7 | HOMESTAND | SEPTEMBER 20-25, 2005

San Francisco Giants | ACTIVE ROSTER**25 Barry Bonds**

BA	HR	RBI	OBP
.313	2	3	.400

**2 Randy Winn**

BA	HR	RBI	OBP
.297	17	56	.353

**39 Todd Linden**

BA	HR	RBI	OBP
.219	4	13	.284

**13 Omar Vizquel**

BA	HR	RBI	OBP
.273	3	45	.334

**5 Ray Durham**

BA	HR	RBI	OBP
.297	12	58	.365

**12 E. Alfonzo**

BA	HR	RBI	OBP
.284	2	43	.334

**7 Pedro Feliz**

BA	HR	RBI	OBP
.258	20	80	.305

BENCH	BA	HR	RBI	OBP
1 Angel Chavez, SS	.182	0	0	.182
21 Jason J. Ellison, OF	.272	4	24	.324
8 Yramid Haad, C	.048	0	1	.087
33 Justin Knoedler, C	.250	0	0	.400
28 Lance Niekro, IB	.257	11	43	.296
57 Julio Ramirez, OF	.000	0	0	.000

**22 Mike Matheny**

BA	HR	RBI	OBP
.245	13	59	.298

← Manager Felipe Alou

IB Coach Luis Pujols

Hitting Coach Joe Lefebvre

Bench Coach Ron Wotus

Pitching Coach Dave Righetti

3B Coach Gene Glynn

OUTSIDE THE LINES

The oft-walked Barry Bonds' return gives the Giants something lacking from their lineup — base runners:

- The next-highest on-base-percentage behind Barry Bonds is .365, from second baseman Ray Durham.
- No one in the lineup besides Bonds has a batting average over .300.
- A groin injury to right fielder Moises Alou means Todd Linden — and his .219 BA and .284 OBP — plays.

Starting Pitchers
Jason Schmidt | 29
W-L ERA K WHIP

Noah Lowry | 51
W-L ERA K WHIP

41 Brad Hennessy | 48 5.25 54 1.67
W-L ERA K WHIP

Kevin J. Correia | 53 2-5 4.76 44 1.61
W-L ERA K WHIP

Matt Cain | 43 2-1 2.00 16 1.19
W-L ERA K WHIP
The Bullpen
49 Armando Benitez
W-L ERA K WHIP

Scott Eyre | 47 2-2 2.83 60 1.07
W-L ERA K WHIP

32 LaTroy Hawkins | 2-7 3.76 41 1.41
W-L ERA K WHIP

45 Tyler Walker | 4-4 4.69 52 1.60
W-L ERA K WHIP

Brett Tomko | 35 7-14 4.54 102 1.39
W-L ERA K WHIP

59 Jeremy Accardo | 0-4 4.10 14 1.06
W-L ERA K WHIP
(Series) Barry Who? Giants Show Their Depth

The Nationals don't need to worry about stopping Barry Bonds so much this week as they do ➤

stopping his impersonators.

Sure, the sub-.500 Giants haven't had the season they envisioned even without Bonds, but their other outfielders have picked up some of the slack.

First there's Pedro Feliz — the ultimate utility man who has played more left field than any other Giant this season. Feliz — who'll probably see action at first base against the Nationals — could end up breaking his own career bests in homers

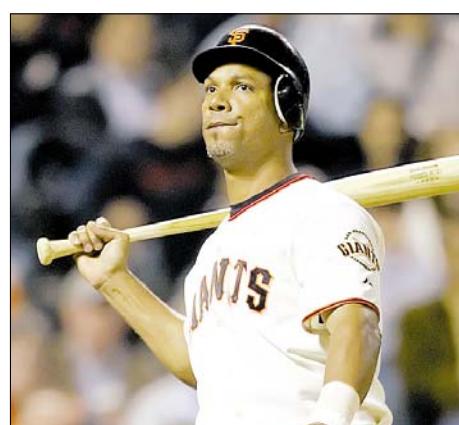
(22) and RBI (84) with a good September.

Then there's Moises Alou, who last made headlines for that comment about peeing on his hands to toughen them. That trick must be working, as he was batting over .300 through mid-September despite missing stretches in April and August.

Finally, there's Randy Winn, who started September on a tear, going 22 for 53 in his first 13 games of the month.

Bonds should see some action this week at RFK Stadium, but stopping the other guys may be more important if the Nats want to pick up a few wins.

LAST MATCH-UP: The Nationals took two of three from the Giants in May at SBC Park, putting



DON'T ASK: You don't want to know what's been on Moises Alou's hands before he goes to bat.

up what now seems like an unthinkable 23 runs in the series. San Francisco shortstop Omar Vizquel was responsible for the only Giants victory, scoring three runs and driving in the game-winner in the bottom of the 13th inning on May 8.

ACES UP: Giants hurlers have put on a show in the second half. San Francisco starters posted the fourth-best ERA in the National League between the All-Star break and mid-September. The staff as a whole posted the second best ERA in the league over a six-week span ending Sept. 12.

MAKING CONTACT: Giants hitters had logged the fewest strikeouts in the National League as of last week. ERIC BRANDNER

In the Clear

After a year of knee problems and speculation, Bonds is back

BARRY LAMAR BONDS

has been called several things in his 20-year Major League career.

Superstar. Cheater. Icon. Showoff. Bad teammate. Misunderstood.

Hate him or love him, when it comes to hitting Bonds is still at the top. And during the moments he's in the batter's box, there's only one word opposing pitchers can use to describe him: Threatening.

Whether or not he's still in the batter's box this season — or even by the time the Giants make their way to Washington this week — is up in the air.

It's been a tough year for the seven-time MVP.

He's had four knee surgeries since last October, broken from regular baseball decorum by keeping the team out of the loop on his rehab, was reportedly investigated by Major League Baseball and the federal government for tax fraud and seen a few of his Bay Area Laboratory Co-operative (BALCO) buddies cop plea deals.

After all that, the slugger — one of only three players in Major League history to belt 700 career home runs — nearly went deep in his first at-bat of the season, settling for a double against San Diego at SBC Park on Sept. 12.

"That at-bat was amazing," Padres manager Bruce Bochy told MLB.com. "For him to do that after missing that much time ... He's a freak."

No one in baseball elicits as many questions as No. 25.

"Didn't he used to be really skinny?"

"Was his head always that big?"

"How'd his home run totals

shoot through the roof?"

"No, really, did something happen to his head?"

Bonds has an answer for everything, and while the court of public opinion may lean one way on the issue, there's been little action against Bonds by Major League Baseball or the United States legal system.

The most scrutinized player in baseball's steroid rumor mill — whose personal trainer, Greg Anderson, was indicted for his involvement with the drugs — wasn't even made to come testify before Congress on the issue in March.

What has been settled — through his own admissions and leaked grand jury testimony — is that the slugger has used "the clear" and "the cream," which were not banned by Major League Baseball at the time. Bonds contended he thought the supple-

JEFF CHIU/AP

HE'S BACK: Barry Bonds homered twice in his first week playing this season, leaving him only nine short of Babe Ruth (714).

YR	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	TB	SB	CS	SF	SH	Avg	SLG
'04	147	373	129	135	27	3	45	90	232	303	6	1	3	0	.362	.812
'05	6	16	3	5	1	0	2	3	3	12	0	0	1	0	.313	.750

ments were legal. New York Yankees slugger Jason Giambi — who admitted to steroid use — told a grand jury that Anderson described the same drugs as undetectable alternatives to steroids.

The whole truth about Bonds — what he knew, what exactly did or did not take and when — will probably never surface. Conspiracy buffs floated the theory all season

that his time in knee-rehab hell was simply a convenient excuse to purge him from the game and avoid a controversial run at Hank Aaron's home run record.

But with Bonds back and apparently capable, the questions are now not if but where he might get a shot at baseball immortality.

Bonds, 41, has one more season on his contract in San Francisco,

but playing the outfield on his surgically-repaired knee is currently a dicey proposition at best. And with an \$18 million price tag and a load of baggage, he could be a tough sell for American League teams looking to add power at designated hitter.

Still, Giants general manager Brian Sabean called the slugger "a significant piece of the puzzle" for 2006. ERIC BRANDNER



ROD DASNER/AP

Omar Vizquel is a hero in his native Venezuela, and revered in the U.S., too.

Vizquel Still the Gold Standard

OMAR VIZQUEL is an old man. In baseball years, he's teetering on ancient. By a shortstop's standards, he should have been moved to one of those assisted-living communities — first base or third base — to make life easier on him.

But, no, at 38 years old he's still playing shortstop, ranging into the hole to throw out a runner or deftly turning a double play. In his first year with the San Francisco Giants, after 16 with Seattle and Cleveland, Vizquel isn't giving an inch.

With nine gold gloves on his shelf, he's on pace to commit fewer than 10 errors this season. He has been the definition of consistency, a throwback at a position where less emphasis now is put on speed and defense.

In his home country of Venezuela — a breeding ground for shortstops, which produced stars like Luis Aparicio and Davey Concepcion — he is a legend.

When he signed with the Giants, teammate and Venezuela-native Edgardo Alfonzo eagerly gave up his jersey number to his elder.

"I grew up wanting to play like he played," Alfonzo, a mere child at 31 years old, told MLB.com. "Others grow up wanting to be Aparicio and Concepcion. People my age wanted to be like Omar."

Vizquel has a reputation for having fun. He's a musician and a clubhouse prankster. But first and foremost, he's a ballplayer. The second oldest everyday shortstop in major-league history has no plans to retire any time soon, but he's growing comfortable with the idea that young players look to him as an inspiration.

"Everybody said I was too small and I was not strong enough, I would not make it," Vizquel told MLB.com. "But I have. If kids want to look up to me, I hope it is for that. I believe in myself. Kids need to believe anything is possible." DEREK TURNER



New York Mets | ACTIVE ROSTER**30 Cliff Floyd**

BA	HR	RBI	OBP
.272	31	91	.351

**15 Carlos Beltran**

BA	HR	RBI	OBP
.272	15	69	.338

**20 Victor Diaz**

BA	HR	RBI	OBP
.260	11	35	.336

**7 Jose B. Reyes**

BA	HR	RBI	OBP
.276	7	56	.304

**25 Kaz Matsui**

BA	HR	RBI	OBP
.257	3	24	.302

**5 David Wright**

BA	HR	RBI	OBP
.312	21	89	.393

**27 Mike Jacobs**

BA	HR	RBI	OBP
.298	6	13	.375

BENCH	BA	HR	RBI	OBP
18 Marlon Anderson, UTIL	.258	4	14	.311
3 Miguel Cairo, INF	.242	2	15	.318
11 Ramon A. Castro, C	.257	7	40	.369
16 Doug Mientkiewicz,	.241	11	29	.335
21 Gerald Williams, OF	.250	1	3	.276
41 Chris Woodward, UTIL	.289	3	18	.341



← Manager Willie Randolph
3B Coach Manny Acta
Hitting Coach Rick Down

**31 Mike Piazza**

BA	HR	RBI	OBP
.259	16	57	.326

Bench Coach Sandy Alomar Sr.
Pitching Coach Rick Peterson
Bullpen Coach Guy Conti

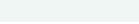
OUTSIDE THE LINES

The Mets' bench has flowed with players coming and going as they've tried desperately to stay in the Wild Card race, but they still haven't found good bats:

- Besides utility player Chris Woodward, the highest batting average is a mere .258. The lowest batting average belongs to catcher Mike DiFelice, at .063.
- Only catcher Ramon A. Castro has an on-base-percentage above .350.

Starting Pitchers**45 Pedro Martinez**

W-L	ERA	K	WHIP
15-7	2.80	207	.93

47 Tom Glavine

W-L	ERA	K	WHIP
11-13	3.75	88	1.44

34 Kris Benson

W-L	ERA	K	WHIP
9-8	4.16	88	1.28

29 Steve Trachsel

W-L	ERA	K	WHIP
1-3	3.42	12	1.14

Jae Seo

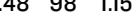
W-L	ERA	K	WHIP
7-2	2.33	53	1.00

The Bullpen**Braden Looper**

W-L	ERA	K	WHIP
4-7	3.66	27	1.42

39 Roberto Hernandez

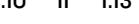
W-L	ERA	K	WHIP
6-6	2.63	58	1.20

48 Aaron Heilman

W-L	ERA	K	WHIP
4-3	3.48	98	1.15

38 Victor Zambrano

W-L	ERA	K	WHIP
7-11	4.12	97	1.45

Juan Padilla

W-L	ERA	K	WHIP
1-1	2.10	11	1.13

Heath Bell

W-L	ERA	K	WHIP
1-3	4.67	39	1.40

(Series) Third Baseman Shows the Wright Stuff

David Wright is retro. You have to go back to the mid-1980s with Dwight Gooden and >>

Darryl Strawberry to find such a young player who made a large contribution to the Mets. And — assuming he doesn't follow their route and try to snort the baselines — Wright's future in Flushing looks pretty bright.

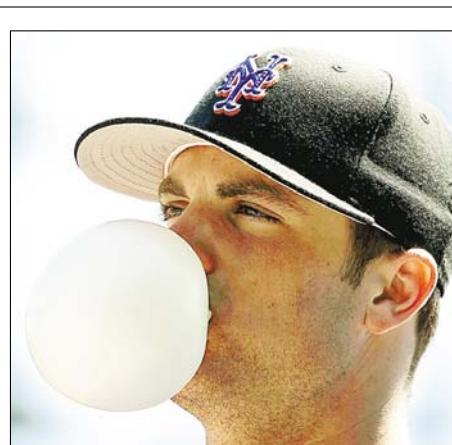
The Norfolk, Va., native was named National League Player of the Week for the week ending Aug. 28, batting .481 with three homers, 10 runs and 25 total bases during that span. He hit an NL-best .352 from the All-Star

break through Sept. 14.

The 22-year-old third baseman — who moved up to the clean-up spot for two games last week against the Nationals — should come close to the 100 RBI mark by season's end and is also in striking distance of the club record for doubles (44).

ALL EVEN: The Mets enter the series with an 8-8 record against Washington this season after Washington pulled off a three-game sweep at Shea Stadium last week. New York holds a 4-3 edge at RFK this season.

ALL-STAR ON THE OUTS: Mike Piazza wants to play somewhere in 2006, but it probably won't be



POP UP: The Mets hope Norfolk, Va., native David Wright's bubble doesn't burst anytime soon.

with the Mets. Manager Willie Randolph recently announced the aging catcher will split time the rest of the way with Ramon Castro. Castro and 24-year-old Mike Jacobs (who had a pinch-hit three-run homer against the Nats Aug. 21 in his first Major League at-bat) figure to fight for the job next season. Expect all three to see action this series.

THIEVES: As of Sept. 13, the Mets were tops in the Majors with 138 stolen bases. While lead-off hitter Jose Reyes is always a threat to swipe a bag, New York had a Major League-best six players with double-digit steals as of mid-September (that includes sluggers Cliff Floyd and Carlos Beltran). ERIC BRANDNER

A Changeup

Pedro Martinez bucks Mets' trend by living up to his big contract

PEDRO MARTINEZ bucks trends.

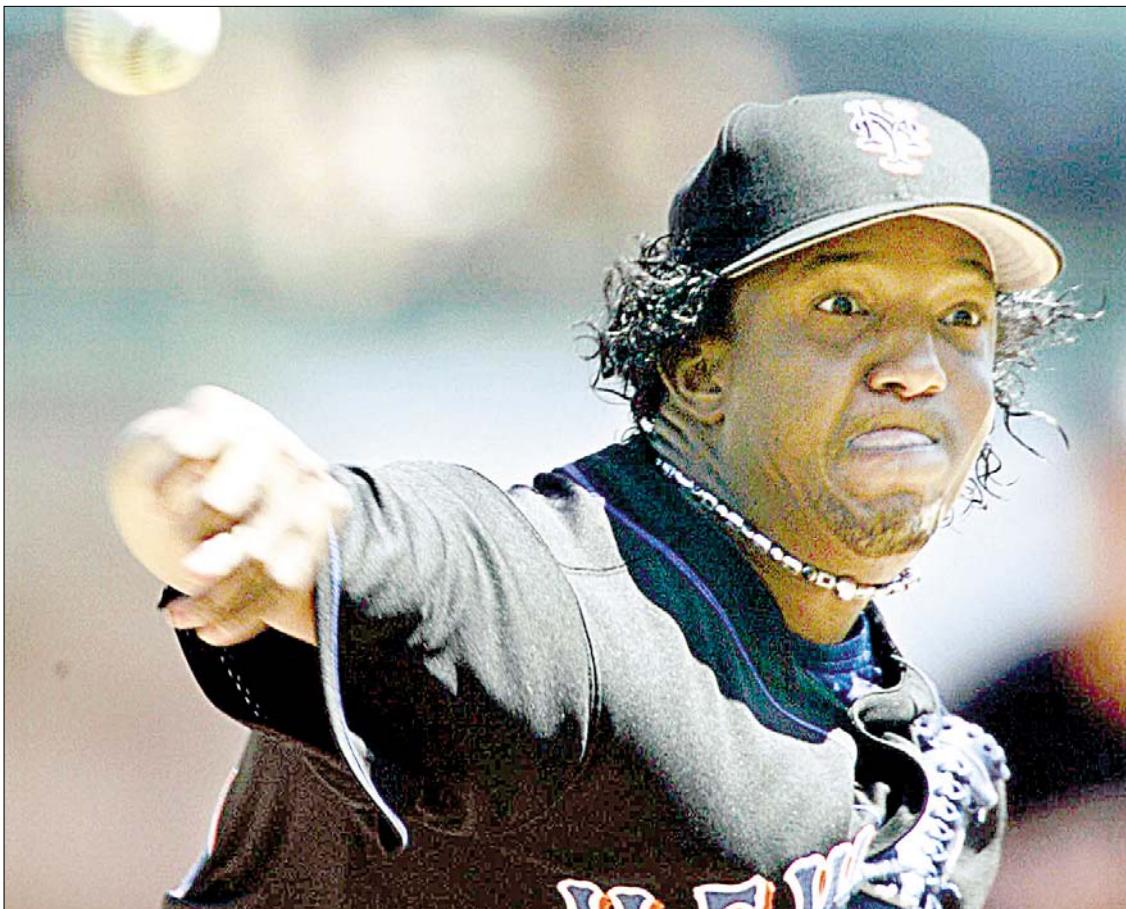
He's skipped All-Star games. He walked away from World Series champ Boston to join the perennial also-ran New York Mets. He's unsuccessfully tried to restore the Jheri curl to popularity.

You can say what you want about the skinny pitcher from the Dominican Republic, but you can't deny he delivers the goods.

The Bronx is where good players go to win rings. Flushing is where they go to pad their 401(k).

Tom Glavine, Robbie Alomar and Mo Vaughn — arguably three of the best players in baseball during their respective primes — each came to New York within the last five years, got a big paycheck and proceeded to become a disappointment. Alomar and Vaughn are long gone. Glavine — who was just 28 victories shy of 300 as of last week — has yet to post a winning season in New York.

The arm problems that sporadically hindered Martinez during his time in Boston, along with the recent Mets precedent of signing free agent failures, suggested the righty could become the latest multi-million dollar disappointment for New York's other baseball team.



Pedro Martinez won 12 of his first 15 decisions as a New York Met — even as he received minimal run support from the offense.

W	L	ERA	G	GS	CG	SHO	SV	SVO	IP	H	R	ER	HR	HPB	BB	SO
16	9	3.90	33	33	1	1	0	0	217	193	99	94	26	16	61	227
15	7	2.80	30	30	4	1	0	0	212	153	67	66	19	3	45	207

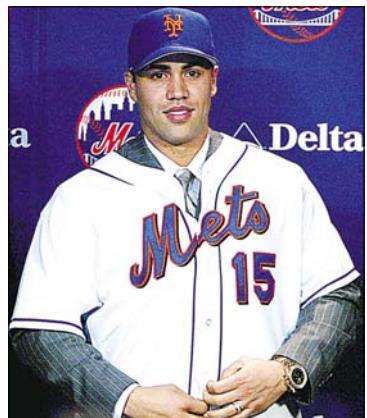
Beltran Has Been a Royal Flush in N.Y.

HE'S NOT IN Kansas City anymore.

Carlos Beltran made a name for himself in that small-market town, becoming the biggest star on the Royals' discount roster. Seasons of 20 home runs and 100 RBIs were the norm, and everyone knew it was a matter of time before he left for bigger crowds and bigger bucks.

A midseason trade last season to the Houston Astros got the 28-year-old out of baseball's purgatory, and he thrived — hitting a combined 38 home runs with 102 RBIs and 42 stolen bases. His eight postseason homers seemed to confirm he was ready for a grander stage.

So it was only a mild surprise when the New York Mets inked Beltran, the gem of the free-agent class, to a seven-year, \$119 million deal.



A \$119 million contract lured Carlos Beltran to New York from Houston.

Thus far, Beltran has been a statistical bust.

His batting average has settled somewhere in the .270 range, but Beltran will likely finish with the fewest home runs and RBI of his big-league career (excluding 2000, in which he appeared in only 98 games).

The Mets take comfort in his perseverance and hope that the power shortage was a one-year aberration. Beltran has steadfastly played through the struggles and even the pain. A collision with teammate Mike Cameron on Aug. 11 left him with a bone fracture near his left eye, but he opted against surgery and chose to remain in the lineup. It was a decision worthy of a \$119 million contract.

"I think he felt he wanted to be with his teammates," general manager Omar Minaya told MLB.com. "And it was important for him to be here ... and go out there and play." DEREK TURNER

But with the season winding to a close, Martinez has proven his worth, posting at least 14 wins for the ninth time in his career.

"He's an artist up there when he's on," Mets catcher Mike Piazza told MLB.com. "It's fun because you just ride along. When he's throwing that well, you can do a lot of things."

Many thought Martinez's train might have derailed for other reasons than the curse of the big-money Mets. The righty — who missed most of 2001 with arm problems — returned to form the last three seasons in Boston, getting over the 200-inning hump last year for the first time since 2000. Still, the hurler's four-year, \$53 million deal has him slated to throw in New York through his 17th Major League cam-

VOTE FOR PEDRO

Martinez has pretty much won every pitching award out there:

- The 1997 National League Cy Young Award
- The 1999 American League Cy Young Award
- The 1999 All-Star Game Most Valuable Player
- The 2000 American League Cy Young Award
- ESPY awards in 2000 and 2001 for Outstanding Baseball Performance

paign — something that would be a marvel in itself for a strikeout artist who threw 28 complete games over a four-year span at the end of the 1990s.

Martinez quickly showed he was up to the task, winning 12 of his first 15 decisions as a Met — and has gone on to post his seventh career 200-inning, 200-strikeout season.

Of course, that's not to say there's not been some tough luck. After all, this is the Mets. Martinez, who flirted with a no-hitter a few times this year, lost both his Aug. 14 start and his chance at franchise immortality (no Mets pitcher has ever thrown a no-no) in just two pitches, surrendering an eighth-inning triple to Los Angeles' Antonio Perez and then a two-run homer to Jayson Werth in a 2-1 loss.

A loss is never a good thing. But Martinez pitching late into games during the Mets' stretch run has to be seen as a positive sign for the franchise that's used to getting far less than what they paid for.

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